

Message Text

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FOL REPEAT BEIRUT 3351 SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO AMMAN

CAIRO DAMASCUS JERUSALEM JIDDA KUWAIT MOSCOW

TEL AVIV BAGHDAD MAR 17

QTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3351

DEPT PASS SECRETARY'S PARTY

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PFOR PLO IS SY XF

SUBJ: PLO FEELING ITS WAY ON QUESTION OF JOINT COMMAND WITH SYRIA

REF: A. BEIRUT 3101; B. DAMASCUS 985(NOTAL).

1. PLO EX COMM MEETING MAR 15 IN DAMASCUS UNDER
'ARAFAT'S CHAIRMANSHIP APPARENTLY PLACED SYRIAN-SPONSORED
PROPOSALFOR JOINT PLO/SYRIAN COMMAND AT TOP OF AGENDA.
FOLLOWING SESSION, PLO OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN ABU MAYZAR
ISSUED STATEMENT REPORTING EX COMM'S DECISION "TO
WELCOME FULLY" PRES ASSAD'S INITIATIVE IN SUGGESTING JOINT
COMMAND (FBIS JN152220). IT WAS LATER ANNOUNCED THAT 42-
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MAN PLO CENTRAL COUNCIL HAS BEEN CONVOKED BY EX COMM

TO DISCUSS BASIS ON WHICH JOINT COMMAND IS TO BE IMPLEMENTED.

2. MEANWHILE, PAST WEEKEND WITNESSED SUBSTANTIAL INTENSIFICATION OF SOVIET CONTACTS WITH PLO OFFICIALS. AMB AT LARGE VINOGRADOV ARRIVED BEIRUT EVENING MAR 15 FROM AMMAN FOR "PRIVATE VISIT" OF SEVERAL DAYS PRIOR RETURNING TO MOSCOW. ON MAR 16, HE AND SOVIET AMB SOLDATOV, MET FOR THREE HOURS WITH 'ARAFAT AND FAROUQ QADDUMI, HEAD OF PLO POLITICAL DEPT. NO DETAILS THESE DISCUSSIONS AVAILABLE, BUT QADDUMI LATER CHARACTERIZED THEM AS "VERY POSITIVE". IN ADDITION, VLADIMIR KUDRYATSEV, VICE PRES OF AFRO-ASIAN SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE, REPORTEDLY BLEW INTO DAMASCUS OVER WEEKEND AT HEAD OF SOV PARLIAMENTARY DEL WHICH LOST NO TIME IN MEETING WITH ABU SALEH, LEFTIST MEMBER OF FATAH CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND MAJED ABU SHARAR, PLO INFORMATION FUNCTIONARY.

3. COMMENT: PRESS AND OTHER SOURCES PROVIDE NO FIRM BASIS FOR LINKING PLO CONSIDERATION OF "JOINT COMMAND" PROPOSAL WITH PLO-SOVIET CONSULTATIONS. INsofar AS BOTH DEVELOPMENTS SEEM TO TOUCH ON QUESTION OF PLO PARTICIPATION IN RECONVENED GENEVA CONFERENCE, HOWEVER, SOME RELATIONSHIP CANNOT BE EXCLUDED. SOME KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVERS HERE IN FACT CONTEND THAT "JOINT COMMAND" CONCEPT WAS STUDIED INTENSIVELY IN PLO-SOVIET CONTACTS IN BEIRUT AND THAT SOVIET RESPONSE WAS POSITIVE. PREDICTABLY, AL HADAF, WEEKLY ORGAN OF "REJECTIONIST" PFLP, HAS CHARGED THAT "JOINT COMMAND" PROPOSAL IS "COVER UP" FOR PLO PARTICIPATION AT GENEVA AND EVENTUAL RECONCILIATION WITH KING HUSSEIN.

4. PUBLICLY AND OFFICIALLY, PLO LEADERSHIP HAS THUS FAR NOT COMMITTED ITSELF TO ACCEPTANCE OF ASSAD'S PROPOSAL, ALTHOUGH VARIOUS FEDAYEEN LEADERS HAVE PRONOUNCED THEMSELVES FAVORABLY ON THE IDEA. ABOVE ABU MAYZAR STATEMENT WENT LITTLE FURTHER THAN 'ARAFAT'S COMMENTS REPORTED PARA 2, REFTEL A. NEVERTHELESS, IT APPEARS PLO CENTRAL COUNCIL WILL BE CONVENED SHORTLY, POSSIBLY MAR 20, TO CONSIDER PROPOSAL IN CLIMATE OF GROWING PALESTINIAN SUPPORT FOR IT. DESPITE ALL THESE FRANTIC PLO MEETINGS, WE THINK IT LIKELY THAT DECISION TO ACCEPT OR DECLINE ASSAD'S PROPOSAL WILL END UP BEING MADE CONFIDENTIAL

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BY 'ARAFAT HIMSELF.

5. WE CONTINUE BELIEVE 'ARAFAT AND MANY AROUND HIM ARE SUSPICIOUS OF SYRIAN MOTIVES AND INTENTIONS AND WOULD, UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, FIRMLY BUT DIPLOMATICALLY WRIGGLE OUT OF ASSAD'S SCHEME. TIMES FOR PLO ARE NOT NORMAL, HOWEVER, SINCE 'ARAFAT AND CO ARE MORE CONCERNED THAN EVER THAT THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS WILL BYPASS

PLO ENTIRELY. THEY PROBABLY VIEW JOINT COMMAND WITH SYRIA
AS OFFERING SOME ASSURANCE THAT DAMASCUS WILL NOT MAKE
DEAL WITH ISRAEL WHICH WOULD LEAVE PLO COMPLETELY ISOLATED.
IT PROBABLY ALSO APPEALS TO THEM AS PROVIDING COUNTERWEIGHT
TO EGYPT AT TIME WHEN CAIRO APPEARS, IN PALESTINIAN
EYES, TO BE PURSUING SAUVE QUI PEUT POLICY AND ISRAEL AND
USG HAVE SHOWN NO SIGN OF AGREEING DEAL WITH PLO. THESE
CONSIDERATIONS, WHICH BEAR ON VERY SURVIVAL OF PLO IN ITS
PRESENT INCARNATION, MAY WELL TIP PLO SCALES IN FAVOR OF
ASSAD'S PROPOSAL, PROMPTING 'ARAFAT AND FATAH TO SWALLOW
THEIR APPREHENSIONS RE THREAT OF SYRIAN DOMINATION AND TO PROCEED
CAUTIOUSLY INTO A MORE FORMAL (ON PAPER AT LEAST) REATIONSHIP
WITH SARG.
GODLEY

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